



AC Transit

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT

INTERVIEW WITH ALAN L. BINGHAM

AC TRANSIT began operations on October 1, 1960, one year after voters approved a \$16,500,000 bond issue to buy out the Key System Transit Lines. AC now has 812 buses serving 37 communities in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties plus trans-bay service to San Francisco. Daily ridership is over 220,000. AC TRANSIT is governed by a directly elected, seven-member Board of Directors and has 1,942 employees. The District is financed, in part, by a consolidated property tax of 47.3¢ per \$100 assessed valuation.

ALAN L. BINGHAM, General Manager of AC TRANSIT since 1967, is a graduate in accounting from the University of California. Bingham serves as chairman of the Bus Technical Committee of the American Public Transit Association, advising UMTA on the development of Transbus.

What changes do you see ahead for transit?

Transit has to be responsive to society, especially in urban areas. The energy problem is here. As a result, we will have to travel together more, and the use of public transit will increase.

What is AC Transit's most pressing problem?

Financing. To double its ridership, AC will have to have another 800 buses. That would be a problem if the demand comes all at once, especially if there is a lag in getting buses.

What decision was made in the lawsuit between the major bus manufacturers that threatened delivery of buses?

Two major bus manufacturers came out with major improvements in buses--the first since 1959. The third major bus manufacturer, AM General, did not. AM General sued, claiming that if federal funds are used to pay for new buses, AM had been excluded from the bidding. Recently, a judge ruled that AM had no claim--it had neither been excluded nor discriminated against. AM has 30 days to appeal the case, but I don't know what they plan to do.

Has AC had problems with labor?

AC is concluding a three-year contract on June 30, and negotiations on a new contract will begin soon. It took a two-month strike to get the last contract settled. I have no idea what's going to happen at the end of

the present contract. I can't help but believe that our employees and union leadership are aware of the attitude of the voters toward pay for public employees. Most marked were voters' actions in San Francisco, a labor-oriented community, for more restrictive charter amendments regarding ceilings on pay for public employees. Historically, labor has taken the position "Don't tell us about your money problems, that's your worry." Labor believes that labor should not subsidize the taxpayer through low wages; the taxpayer should pay for what he is getting.

What are AC's arrangements with other transit operators for transfers?

At the San Francisco Terminal, you walk out to the street, pay 25¢, and ride the MUNI streetcar. Between BART and AC buses there is no additional fare for a transfer. To get transfers from AC to BART would take changes in the automatic fare collection equipment. We could do it between MUNI and AC without any new equipment, but we are not planning any transfers between the two systems. The legislature and MTC are taking the position that we must get 35% of our operating expenses out of the farebox. If we provide any new free transfers, we'd have to raise fares. If the rider doesn't pay for the transfer, it must come from somewhere, either additional subsidies or from other riders.

Some think it would be easier to use transit if one could buy one ticket to ride anywhere in the Bay Area. Do you think we

could have a one-ticket, regional transit system?

If we want a one-ticket, regional transit system, we would have to spend approximately \$5000 for each vehicle so ticketing could be accommodated on the originating vehicle. No such technology is available at the moment. The federal government has explored the feasibility of trying to do something like that and that's where we get the \$5000 figure. I think it's an excellent idea, but we have to decide whether the benefit is worth the cost to the people in the Bay Area. I don't know the answer.

Would establishment of a Transit Coordinating Council, as called for in Speaker McCarthy's AB 1107, help Bay Area transit operators develop a truly regional transit system?

McCarthy's Transit Council is unnecessary. We already have a Transit Operators Association. The general managers of the six major operators serve as a Board of Control, and we have six committees, each on a specific subject and each chaired by staff from one of the operators. We've been meeting for a few months. I'm very excited about this more formalized structure.

Has there been agreement by the Boards of Directors of the transit districts on the formation of this Association? Is it a joint powers agreement?

No, it's not a joint powers agreement. I've seen no indication of any disagreement by the Boards on the establishment of the Association. If there was a strong disagreement by some Board, that general manager would have to say he cannot go along with us. It is a voluntary Association. We have worked together in the past on service, such as routes, frequency, etc. Now we are into internal matters, such as procurement, management and maintenance, which do not have a high profile for the public, but are important to our operations. MTC has been asked to send a representative, but has not done so. (Editor's note: Bingham serves as chairman of this Association.)

Would this Association help make a decision on whether AC or BART should expand service in the transbay corridor?

An Association would not help make that decision. That is a fundamental policy that affects taxpayers, and I see that emanating from the Boards of Directors, who are elected by the taxpayers. However, from a prac-

tical standpoint, I think MTC would have a significant voice in that decision because it controls the distribution of some of the funds we receive.

What are AC's plans regarding transbay service?

We have had plans to abandon transbay service for some time, but abandoning service is not an easy thing to do. Where would the people go? They can't get on BART during the peak hours, and we have people coming back to AC after riding BART because of BART's unreliability. We have temporarily shelved our plans to abandon service until BART is reliable and has enough service to handle the riders. Then we will charge ahead and abandon service, regardless of what our customers say. Both the transbay and East Bay express runs will be abandoned according to our plans. We've never made an analysis of which "makes" more money for us--transbay or local routes, but no route is making a profit, so we've no incentive to hang onto anything.

How are AC's contract services with outlying communities progressing?

The experience has been good. First, we had a contract with BART for express buses, then with Concord, Pleasant Hill, and Moraga. We will start services soon in Pittsburg and Antioch. Discussions have also taken place with the Amador Valley area and Western Contra Costa County (Rodeo and Pinole). From the communities' standpoint, contracting for service has two advantages: 1) the city utilizes our transit experience and professionalism, and 2) the decisions on where to go, how often, and what fares will be charged rest with the cities, so they can shape the service the way they want it.

If you could choose one thing that would aid transit the most, what would it be?

Adequate financing. We need congressional and state legislative action to support transit. The farebox may help to some extent, if we can get more people riding during the middle of the day. We will probably be raising fares to help, too. AC passed a resolution showing its agreement and disagreement with MTC's transit financing recommendations. We supported the use of bridge tolls for transit, but the legislation needs to be changed so those funds can be used for operating expenses.